

By Your Side by OTTSTF

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Summary:

Mike refuses to let El take the Demogorgon alone.

She's helped them so much throughout the week. It's only right that he helps her in return.

As they find the Wheeler house surrounded by bad men, they realise that finding a place to stay may be a difficult task.

They have each other, though, so no matter what, they'll battle through it. *Together.*

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Does this still count as an early reunion if they never really left each-other's side?

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"El!" Mike calls, running to her in panic. She's about to stop him in his path, but he's already by her side, grasping her left hand in both of his.

"Mike..."

"I know..." he says, looking to the Demogorgon, still held against the school wall, groaning, attempting to reach out towards them.

"I know. But you don't have to do it alone."

She attempts to shake her head in refusal.

"Please, El! You've done so much for us, now let me help you. Just this once."

She wants to tell him that's all he's *ever* done since he found her in the woods; that without him, she'd probably be laying dead in those woods right now. But she can't; she doesn't have the words to express herself.

Even if she did, she'd probably be unable to get them out right now. Just thinking about Mike, how amazing he's been towards her ever since he found her. Never has he treated her any different, or made her feel like a stranger. He gave her a home, kept her safe as best he could, and even now, in the face of certain death, wants to stay by her side.

Mike notices a tear rolling down her cheek. He'd wipe it away, but he doesn't want to distract her too much from holding the Demogorgon against the wall. Instead, he simply smiles as she briefly wraps him in her arms. He doesn't care about the blood from her nose finding its way to his shirt; he just raises his arms to embrace her back.

"Thank you." she nearly whispers, before breaking their hug, turning back to the Demogorgon. He quickly takes her hand again, walking with her to the hideous beast held against the wall. He should be panicking, standing this close to certain death; but instead he feels more confident than he ever has. She's saved his life twice already, both times demonstrating how absolutely amazing she really is.

"No more." she tells the beast, before lifting her free hand.

The beast groans in pain as El begins to seemingly tear it apart from the inside. Mike's gaze darts between it and her, watching the two practically stare each-other down in this one-sided fight. He's amazed by the demonstration of raw power emitting from her; and he's taken away by the pure anger in her face.

He's pulled from his thoughts as both the beast and El emit a deathening scream. His head flinches, and all common sense screams at him to cover his ears; but he refuses to let go of El, or even look away.

Pieces of the Demogorgon begin to engulf them. *Now* Mike is panicking, as darkness fills his senses. He grips El's hand tighter, but the feeling fades. The last thing he hears is the ringing of her screams, before silence and darkness overwhelm his senses. He can't move, he can't even talk as he feels consciousness slip from his grasp.

2. Chapter 2

"Mike! Don't be an idiot!"

"Mike!"

"Eleven!"

Dustin and Lucas hang at the back of the classroom, calling after their friends as they approach the do the exact thing they shouldn't be doing: Approach the Demogorgon.

They realise they aren't going to get through to either of them, and so they give up their calls, and instead watch in amazement as El begins tearing the Demogorgon apart from the inside.

That is until both it and El begin screeching loud enough they're sure every US state can hear it. They cover their ears, although it doesn't help at all. After regaining their senses, they observe pieces of the Demogorgon surround Mike and El, completely engulfing them. The lights are off, they're unable to see much of what's happening, until the lights suddenly burst on, and silence surrounds them.

They look up to where Mike, El and the Demogorgon were, to find nothing.

"Mike!" they both call in unison, jumping to their feet.

"Mike!" Dustin tries again, shortly followed by Lucas.

They spin in circles, as if to expect someone to show up behind them at any point. Eventually they run out of the room, still calling for Mike or Eleven, until eventually, with hesitation, they come to realise that their calls are futile. They'd let the Demogorgon take them both; not only Eleven, but Mike as well.

Where the hell are they? Are they okay? Are they... alive? Oh god, what're we going to say? What's going to happen? Will we ever see them again? Why didn't we help... We should've stopped him. We should've stopped them. What if they're in danger? Oh god... Maybe they're in the Upside Down...

"Dustin! Have you seen Michael?"

Karen calls as she runs from their car towards the two boys.

"Mike? No, Mrs. Wheeler. We were going to ask you the same..." he lies, sucking up the guilt and fear inside him. Better to lie than to explain right now, considering *'oh, he just vanished into dust while face-to-face with a Demogorgon'* would likely land him in a mental asylum.

He holds back the cringe as Mrs. Wheeler's face turns to that of absolute fear. He glances to Lucas, who ever so slightly nods his head in approval of his lie.

"Oh god..."

She begins pacing towards the school, but she's held back by two officers.

"Let me through! I need to find my boy!" she screams, trying her hardest to push past them, with no effect.

"Ma'am, we've searched the entire building. Nobody is in there." one of them tells her.

"Bullshit! Let me through!"

"Ma'am, we can't do that. We promise you, the building is empty."

"Mrs. Wheeler, they're telling you the truth. We were the last ones in there." Lucas informs her.

She looks to him, looking like she's about to burst a thousand words out at them. Instead, she hesitates, biting her lip, before running back to Ted. They can't bare to watch; the mere thought of how long they might have to keep this lie up is too much to think, although they're probably going to have that on their minds right until Mike comes

back... *if* he comes back.

And so, they begin walking away, hoping nobody stops them. Get home, act like nothing happened, do *not* mention any of this over the SuperComs, keep a lookout for Mike or Eleven.

Please, let him be okay. Whatever's happened, where-ever he is; if it's the Upside-Down, please let him be with El. She can keep him safe. They can keep each-other safe.

They'll make it.

Notes for the Chapter:

So sorry for the short chapters!

This is the only story that I *don't* have a writer's block for right now, although I like the idea of splitting different scenes into different chapters. Gotta keep you peeps on edge, after all. ♥

Thanks so much for sticking with me!

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

The *slightest* mention of abuse in this one. Basically a single line.

El awakens with a violent cough, attempting to clear her throat of whatever liquid had made itself comfortable inside. She lunges upward from her back, quickly recalling events from – well, however long ago it was; she can't be sure. A quick glance at the environment informs her that dealing with the Demogorgon had transferred her into the Upside-Down somehow. All she remembers is screaming – her head throbbing from the sheer amount of effort she had put into destroying the hideous beast she had held against the school wall.

School. That's where she is. Well; the Upside-Down variant. They'd used a makeshift salt bath to aid her in finding Barbera and Will... before *they* found them. *Papa*. He caused this, right from the start. If they hadn't found them, she wouldn't have had to kill those people – the Demogorgon would never have found them in the school.

She remembers the last faces she saw before facing the Demogorgon. Lucas, Dustin carrying her, Mike telling her everything would be fine, that they'd go to the Snow Ball together, that she could eat all the Eggos she wanted...

Mike, who had stood by her side as she took on the Demogorgon; gripped her hand so tight it could've cut circulation.

Mike. Oh god.

She looks to her side and sees him, laying face-down on the floor.

" Mike!" she shouts, darting to his side. It doesn't take long for her panic to build and tears start to fall as she receives no response from him.

S truggling to roll him onto his back manually, she gives in and does so telekinetically; not caring about the sheer pain in her head. The

first thing she notices is that the same liquid had been dripping from his agape mouth.

"Mike! Wake up!" she tries again, receiving no response. She coughs a sob, fearing the worst.

"Please, don't be gone. Please, Mike!" she shakes him slightly at first, more violently as he doesn't wake.

"Mike!" she practically screams, still being met with no response.

Taking a deep breath, her heart pounding, she lowers her ear to his chest, to hear something, *anything*, that can be a sign of life.

Relief fills her, leaning back up with a large breath as she hears a heartbeat, and faint attempts at breathing.

"Mike..." she whimpers, despite knowing it won't wake him up. Her mind begins racing, desperate to wake Mike up somehow. He's not responding to literal screams in his face, or shakes, gentle or rough.

She flashes back to the lab; how they'd lock her in the tiny, cold room for what she'd assume was an entire night. She remembers the way some of the bad men would wake her up before she'd gotten used to waking herself from the slightest sound: a painful slap across the face that would sting for hours after.

She cringes at the thought; not in remembrance of the feeling on herself, however, but the thought of her, doing that to Mike. She looks at him, out cold on the floor, before looking to the palm of her hand. She frowns, hard, not wanting to inflict pain upon Mike; that's the last thing she ever wants to do in her life, but if it wakes him up...

Biting her lip, closing her eyes, she gives in, and lets her hand swing – *hard*. The sound of contact fills the room and makes her cringe on a whole other level. However, as it's followed immediately by a gasp from Mike, El's eyes dart open to find him sat up, coughing up the remaining liquid out of his throat. She lets out the breath she'd held.

"Mike!" she exclaims his name in relief. He turns to her, and his eyes widen as he regains memory of the events leading to this moment.

El expects nothing but his hand finding its way to her face to return the hit; she knows he'd never lay a finger on her in normal

circumstances, but now she's just slapped him harder than she'd ever thought she was capable of, she's sure he'll want nothing but to return it through raw anger.

She braces herself as he practically lunges towards her. She's caught completely off guard as she feels him wrap her in his arms, squeezing so tight, it might cut her circulation at some point. She opens her eyes and glances to his head, which is leaning on her shoulder as he refuses to let her go.

She feels another wave of relief, and absent-mindedly raises her hands to return the hug, squeezing back just as tight as fresh tears break free; this time not from fear or sadness, but from relief and joy. Mike's okay, she's okay, they're both alive and are both together, even if they are in the Upside-Down.

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

Every now and then, you've just gotta scroll through your list of works, and realise how much you neglect a lot of them.

And then you just hope an idea comes to mind, and nearly cheer the house down as something does.

In other words, I'm so sorry for keeping you all waiting.

Eventually, Mike lifts his head from El's shoulder, and begins to take in his surroundings.

School. That much is obvious. *But covered in... vines?*

Oh god...

"El... is this..."

"The Upside-Down." she finishes, confirming his fear with a voice full of her own emotions; both worry and guilt.

"Mike... I'm sorry." she begins tearing up, knowing full well she should've sent him away. She should never have let Mike join her in taking the Demogorgon. He's now stuck in the Upside-Down and it's all her fault.

"El... no, don't be. We're okay – you killed it, remember? We just need to find a way out of here..." he says, not sounding so confident.

He climbs to his feet, struggling initially. As he gains his footing, he holds out a hand to El, to lift her up. She takes it with a watery smile, struggling just as bad to keep herself steady for a moment.

They walk out of the classroom holding each-other tight across the shoulders, as if letting go at any point would mean permanent separation for them both.

"Gate. This way." El says to Mike, intending to lead the way.

“Huh? In the school?” he asks, confused.

“Demogorgon. It made one.” she clarifies.

“Oh, of course!” Mike suddenly realises. “Do you think it’s still there?”

“I hope.” she says, speeding up slightly.

They find said gate, hiding either side as they wait for the other side to be clear.

“It’s... shrunk.” Mike points out.

Without saying a word, El raises her hand, and begins to widen the gate in the wall. Mike’s eyes widen as she visibly struggles, but the gate obeys her commands. As she stops, she stumbles slightly, which Mike prevents without hesitation by holding her up. She gives him another small smile, before returning her gaze to the portal.

“You’re so awesome.” Mike tells her as he returns his own gaze back to it. He notices her smile grow ever so slightly as they step towards the portal.

El sticks her hand through, pushing until the fleshy substance rips open. Pulling her hand back, they both cringe at the thought of climbing through the horrific material. Without a word, both of their hands connect, and they rotate their heads to look into each-other’s eyes.

“Together?” Mike asks.

She nods. “Together.”

And so they both push against the gate, struggling to get through. Their hands making it through first, they eventually make it through and both fall to the floor as the material gives way.

“You okay?” Mike immediately asks her, even before checking himself.

She nods. "Yes. You okay?"

"I'm fine." he confirms. "Let's get the hell out of here."

They begin heading to the one place they can both call safe: home.

"I know you didn't want me to tell mom about you, but I think we should now..." he begins. Her face turns to one of fear, the slight motion of a head shake beginning to form.

"I'm sure we can trust her, El. If I just... try to explain... I don't know how I'll do that but I'll try. I'm not letting anything happen to you, okay? I'm sure she'll have heard about this by now so all I need to tell her is that you saved me, and I'm sure she'll want to help."

Hesitantly, she nods her head. They continue making their way towards the Wheeler home, hands never leaving each-other.

"Oh my god." are Mike's immediate words as he catches sight of his home.

"Bad men..." El follows, their heads snapping towards each-other as she speaks.

"We... we can't go home. They can't see you." Mike says as the painful realisation kicks in.

"Where... where do we go?" El asks.

Mike bites his lip in fear, not knowing at all what to do. *He* himself could perhaps return, although he has no idea how, or what he'd explain in regards to where he'd been and how he'd escaped. They'd know he'd need the help of El to get out of the Upside-Down, so maybe, *oh god*, maybe he'd have to stay away from home too, if it

keeps El safe.

"I... don't know." Mike admits. "But we need to leave, before they see us."

She nods her head, now biting her own lip as she begins to internally panic herself.

"Hey, El, don't worry." Mike begins as they start walking again. "We'll be okay. I'll stick with you no matter what, okay?"

She looks into his eyes, Mike noticing how scared, but also trusting, they have become suddenly.

"Promise?" she asks.

"I promise, El. We just need to find a place... maybe Mrs. Byers could help, but she might call mom... maybe the chief? Maybe he could say he found me, and try to sort something out for you."

"Sort... something out?" she asks, eyebrows scrunching.

"Like, give you somewhere to stay. A home, I hope."

"Home... home is with you." she says, her eyes fixated on his.

"I... I'd really like that, El. I liked taking care of you, El, even if you were cooped up in the basement all the time. But now... it definitely won't work anymore. If the chief can't sort something out, maybe Mrs. Byers could... she knows you, she could let you live with them!"

El's lips twitch slightly. She recalls the woman taking her into her arms as she'd come out from the void in a panic, calming her down quickly. She can only imagine that must be what a mother must be like... comforting, loving.

"Mrs. Byers... would be good." she says, now with a smile on her face. "But I still see you?"

"I hope so, El. I'd come to see you every day as long as it's safe." he cringes at the thought of now being watched by the bad men, in attempts to find El.

She smiles once again, nodding her head. They continue towards the Byers' home in mostly silence.

"Wait here." Mike tells El. "Let me knock and see who's there, just in case."

She nods her head, watching as Mike walks ahead to the door, placing a firm knock onto it. Nothing in response. He tries again, before his hand drops slowly, as if he's realising something. Walking back up to El, his face is clearly in more panic than before.

"I... they're not there." he blurts out. "I bet they're at hospital, if they found Will."

"Will?" her expression snaps to hope.

"I hope so." Mike says honestly. "I'm sure someone would be here otherwise."

She smiles briefly, but it is wiped shortly after as she worries once again.

"Where... can we go?" she finds herself asking once again.

Mike now drops his head, having run out of options.

"We... we can stay in Castle Byers for some cover, I guess. But if we're there for long... food, drink... oh god." Mike is clearly very panicked now. El takes his hands in both of hers in an attempt to calm him down.

"Mike, we'll be okay." she says, trying to reassure herself at the same time.

“We wait here. Mrs. Byers and Will come home. You talk.”

Mike nods his head, biting his lip once again.

“Okay.” he says eventually.

And so they climb into Castle Byers, both fitting in barely.

“We should try to get some sleep.” Mike says. “We could be busy at any time.”

She nods her head, laying down on the rough ground. Mike follows suit, both using their arms as makeshift pillows.

It doesn’t take long before the wind has them both shivering. Mike notices hers more than his own, and so he speaks.

“You’re cold.” he states matter-of-factly.

“Yes.” she confirms. “Very.”

Mike bits his lip, working up the confidence to continue.

“Come here.” he says, patting the spot next to him.

She slowly complies, laying next to him. Mike, already feeling a blush growing on himself, wraps his arms around El. She stiffens for a moment, still not completely comfortable with contact, but she relaxes eventually, her head on Mike’s chest.

“Is this okay?” Mike asks, wanting to be sure that she’s comfortable with their position.

“Yes.” she says. “Nice.”

Mike blushes even more. *Oh well, at least I might warm us both up a bit.* “Yeah... this – uh – is nice.” he admits.

She smiles, glad he thinks so too.

“Good night, Mike.” she says, remembering the first time he’d said it to her.

“Night, El.” he copies.

They eventually fall sleep; El's head remaining firmly planted onto Mike's chest, who holds her tight in his arms.

Hopefully, just hopefully, they'll have a place to go, sooner than later.

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm just as clueless as they are, honestly.

But I want to keep this going, now. I thought about this recently, and this is a fic that I would like to write much more of. So, hence, I shall try.

Thanks for reading as always ♥

5. Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

Ideas. I have ideas. *Holy crap I'm not mentally blocked at the moment!*

Thanks for the feedback, suggestions and encouragement on previous chapters. Every single comment you leave means the absolute world to me, and helps an insane amount.



Mike awakens to the sound of birds chirping. Checking his watch, he finds the time to be just passed 11:00.

Damn. He thinks. *We needed that.*

He looks down to El, who's still fast asleep against his chest. He can't help but break a smile; she looks so peaceful as she sleeps, and quite right too; as peace is exactly what she deserves.

And so he remains completely still, allowing El to wake on her own accord. He reflects on the position of the two of them; the fact that she literally is sleeping atop his chest. Never in his life had he imagined himself in this position, but right now, with El, it seems... *right*. Like it's the most natural thing in the world for them.

It takes about half an hour before El begins to stir. Immediately, Mike notices she's not waking up happily; she seems scared. Mike begins to worry somewhat, wondering how he could help. He doesn't want to just blurt her name or shake her, as that could make things much worse; she's timid enough as it is.

Oh, just do it. He thinks to himself. *You did it in school and she's still here. Besides, the head's much less serious, right?*

To hell with it.

In the hopes it helps her wake peacefully, he places a kiss onto her head, through her thin layer of hair.

"El?" he calls softly, quietly.

The effect is immediate, she's no longer fearful as she finally awakens properly.

El's confused for a moment, opening her eyes to the outdoors, but it doesn't take long for her to remember where she is and why. Despite the circumstances, the feel of Mike's lips to her head puts a smile on her face. She's not sure why; not even knowing what the whole lip-touching thing is supposed to be or mean, but she knows that it feels nice, and it gave her an odd feeling when he'd connected both their lips at the school, no matter how rushed and shy he seemed. Whatever it is, it's good.

"Mike." she says his name as she lifts her head from his chest slowly.

"Hey El." he responds. "How was your sleep?"

"Good." she answers simply, glancing between his eyes and where her head previously lay on his chest. "Thank you."

Mike smiles. "Thank you, too."

He gulps before continuing. "Being with you... it made it easier."

The corner of her lips raise slightly. "Yes. I think so too."

"Good." Mike says, trying not to blush. "We both needed that."

She nods her head.

"Anyway, we should see if they're home yet... I could really do with a drink."

She nods, propping herself up fully, offering him a helping hand just as he had before. He takes it with a smile, before they begin walking to the house, hand-in-hand.

Immediately, the lack of a car present by the house tells Mike that they're still very much alone. He knocks the door anyway, in the hope that someone may be inside, but he receives no response.

"Hey, do you think you could unlock the door?" he asks El. "I'm sure

Mrs. Byers would understand once I explain why we're here."

El nods, before focusing on the lock, commanding it to slide open. She nods to Mike once again after she's done. He opens the door slowly, glancing in. Lights are still strung up around the place, which catches El's attention immediately.

"Oh, Mrs. Byers used the lights to let Will talk to her from the Upside-Down," he tells her. "I think being close to them there would make them light up here? Either way, smart teamwork from both of them, really."

El nods her head in understanding, before following Mike to the kitchen. He grabs two cups, before retrieving milk from the fridge. He pours both of them a glass, before finding some cereal from one of the cupboards. Grabbing two bowls, he fills them, before placing them both on the dining table, placing El's next to his.

They eat in silence, not taking long to empty their bowls. El notices Mike drinking the remainder milk from his bowl, causing her to scrunch her eyebrows slightly, but enough for Mike to notice.

"I know it's a bit odd to drink from a bowl," Mike says. "But the milk, mixed with the chocolate, is beautiful."

She looks at the milk in her bowl, back to Mike, noticing a smudge of chocolate on his upper lip, which causes her to smile slightly. Mike realises why she's smiling at him pretty quickly, and wipes the milk away with his sleeve.

El glances at the bowl again, before shrugging. Raising it, she copies Mike, and she's immediately glad she did. This is the best creation since Eggos.

Mike laughs slightly as she too ends up with milk on her lip, which she wipes away too having assumed she'd ended up with the same milk moustache.

Mike glances around the room, seemingly in thought, before he eventually turns back to El.

"So since we've got nowhere to go... and freezing to death doesn't

sound too fun... do you wanna watch TV until they get back?"

She nods, eager to find out what this whole "TV" thing is about other than reminding you of things in shops.

And so they end up on the sofa, El flicking through channels telekinetically. "We can watch whatever you find interesting." Mike had told her. Eventually she stops on some eye-catchingly colorful cartoon, not taking long to lean her head on Mike's shoulder as they both lose track of time as the TV blasts images at them.

6. Chapter 6

Notes for the Chapter:

Apologies for the delay!

It's quite a challenge trying to keep multiple stories updated frequently.

It's also quite odd having to get into the right mindset for the characters at each different time. Both Mike and El are quite different between here and Halloween, and the fic I've found myself writing a lot of is based at that time. (That fic is [Trick or Treat](#), if you're interested).

Anyway, thanks for sticking with me!

As it turns out, watching TV all day can be pretty boring, and apparently has a tendency to put these two to sleep. They've both fallen in and out more times than they can count, waking with their head against the other's shoulder each time. Before they know it, they're into the late hours of the day, still with no sign of life anywhere near them.

"It's getting pretty late." Mike mumbles to El.

"Where will we sleep?" she asks.

"Well, I don't think they'd mind us using beds; you could sleep in Mrs. Byers' bed, and I'll go in Will's."

"No." she says firmly.

He's shocked, slightly. "No?"

"Please, together."

Oh. Oh.

"El, we're okay here. Nobody can find us unless it's Mrs. Byers, or Jonathan, or Will. We'll be fine."

"Mike. Please."

He gulps absent-mindedly. I guess it won't be so different to last night. What's so bad about being in a bed?

Suck it up, Mike. She needs you.

"O-okay. Then... I think Will's bed is the best idea."

She nods her head. "What if they come home?"

"I'm sure they'll wake us up when they find us. We'll be okay. We tell

them why we're here, and they'll understand. Mrs. Byers' is awesome, she'll be okay with it."

She nods her head, smiling slightly as she feels confident enough to sleep.

"Come on." he gets up, holding his hand out to help her up. "I'll be surprised if we get to sleep at all with how much we've already slept today."

It takes a while, but they do get to sleep eventually. El seems to really like cuddling into Mike, which he'd expected to make him far too shy to actually sleep, but no... it's... right.

The next day comes, they're both sleeping soundly, El still cuddled into Mike, and one of his arms holding her close. Comforting, she finds it. Despite her being the one with superpowers, the feeling of Mike's arm around her makes her feel safer than she has ever felt before.

She'd still be sleeping soundly, if it weren't for the rumbling of an engine waking her up.

She wakes suddenly, glancing around to grasp her surroundings. Mike is still sleeping.

"Mike." she calls his name softly, shaking his shoulder slightly, not wanting to scare him. He stirs, but doesn't wake.

"Mike." she tries again, a little louder. His eyes open slowly as he mumbles incomprehensible words.

His eyes eventually find her, so she points towards the door. Mike jolts up now, realising why she'd woke him up. They head out of Will's bedroom, intending to head towards the window, but the door opens as they're on their way. The person on the other side steps in, not noticing them for a few seconds, but once they do, they freeze in shock, as they stare at the two of them, here, alive, seemingly well.

7. Chapter 7

Notes for the Chapter:

God, I am *so* sorry for the huge absence of updates for this story.

It's been really hard to for me to get into the mindset for this one. I've been stuck in a season 2 mindset, and of course, El is *quite* a different person between the two, so *yeeeah*.

Hopefully I can update this more often as time goes by. I hope this chapter is good enough to make up for the lack!

"Michael?" Jonathan questions his sight as he stares at the two in front of him. "El-Eleven?"

"I can explain!" Mike blurts out in a slight panic. "We needed a place to stay! We tried going to my place, but it was swarmed with the bag guys, so we-"

"Is that..." Joyce cuts Mike off as she practically runs into the house. "Oh my god, Michael." she paces towards the two, grabbing them both into a hug so tight it nearly knocks the wind out of them. "Eleven... oh my god, you're both okay."

El feels herself smile at the reaction from Joyce; *still* acting like a caring mother towards her.

"Mrs. Byers, I'm so sorry, we-"

"Michael, Michael." Joyce hushes him quiet. "Calm down, it's okay. I know why you're here."

Mike lifts his head. "You... know?"

She nods her head, sniffing.

"We just came from speaking to your mother. She's... *they're* worried sick. They told us about those lab clowns... I'm guessing you saw them too?"

“Yeah, we did.” Mike confirms. “So we ran. The first place I thought of was Castle Byers. We stayed in there for the first night in case you came home, but... we had to come inside. We were thirsty, hungry, and cold, and we wouldn’t ha-”

“*Michael*.” Joyce insists he stops rambling. “How many times have I told you, you’re welcome in this house? I’m *proud* of you, honey. You did the right thing.”

A smile breaks onto Mike’s face as she tells him this. He lets the urge take over, and grabs Joyce for a hug.

“Thank you so much, Mrs. Byers.” he says through the tears he feels beginning to fall.

“Hey, hey.” Joyce says sternly as she hears the wobble in Mike’s voice.

“Everything will be okay, I promise.”

“How?” Mike pulls back, questioning her promise. “I can’t go back home. If I go back, they’ll know I was saved by El, and won’t stop questioning me. I am absolutely *not* leaving her, ever.”

“Mike.” El takes his hand softly, grabbing his attention. He turns to her with a sniffle.

“You *have* to go home. Your parents...”

“*Screw* my parents!” he interrupts. “I mean, sure, I love my mom, and I wish, *god* I wish I could go back and tell her everything, make her realise that you’re the reason I’m still alive... but I can’t.”

He pauses, sighing.

“Mike...”

“I can’t lose you, El.” Mike admits. “You’ve done everything for me. For *us*. I owe you my life, El. I’m not leaving you, and I’m not going to give those *bastards* any hints that you’re still here.”

“Michael, michael.” Joyce rubs his arm. “Calm down.”

He sniffs, nodding his head.

"I have an idea."

"An idea?" Mike questions. "What?"

"I'll go get Hopper. I'll tell him you're both here. He can say he found you somewhere. El..."

The woman looks to the girl, who's watching her with curious eyes.

"El can stay here if she needs to."

"You'd... let me live here?" El asks.

"Of course I would, El." Joyce answers. "Like Michael said: You've done everything for us. You've saved everyone. You've saved Mike, and you've saved Will. Giving you a home is the least I could do."

"Thank you, Mrs. Byers." Mike says seriously. "Thank you so much."

"No, thank you, Michael." she says. "Thank you, for keeping her safe. Thank you for being smart and coming here."

He hugs her again, as does El. The woman holds the two tight, glad she can give El the happiness she deserves.

"Okay. You two stay here. Jonathan, you grab Will's stuff and take them up. I'll be back with Hopper as soon as I can be, and we'll work this out. Okay?"

Mike and Jonathan both nod their heads. El doesn't let go of Joyce, she does quite the opposite and holds her tighter. "Thank you." she says simply, meaning it from the bottom of her heart.

Joyce feels hers swell. Such a sweet girl; how life could let her suffer the way she has, she doesn't want to know.

"Of course, sweetie. I'll be back as soon as I can, okay?"

El nods, finally letting Joyce go.

"You two make yourself comfortable; I don't know how long I'll be."

Jonathan rumages through the house for a few minutes, locating items to take up to Will. Eventually, he has a basket full, ready to toss in his car.

“I’ll see you guys later, yeah?”

“Yeah.” Mike responds. “Thanks, Jonathan. Tell Will we can’t wait to see him.”

“Sure thing, boss.” Jonathan smiles, closing the door behind him.

Mike soon slowly, softly takes El’s hand in his. “You finally get a home, El! A home, a mom, peace away from assholes at the lab. I can’t believe it.”

El nods, smiling, before hugging Mike tight. He’s confused, but doesn’t hesitate to hug her back.

“Thank you, Mike.” she says softly.

“What for?” Mike questions, confused.

El pulls back slowly, looking Mike in the eyes.

“*You* found me. *You* took me home. *You* helped me. *You* brought me here. *You* gave me this.”

Mike realises what she means, and can’t help the smile that breaks onto his face.

“Yeah... I suppose. I’m so happy we met that night, El. It’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

El can’t help but immitate the smile on his face. *The best thing that’s happened to him.* She hears his words loop. *He said that about me.*

“Me too.” she agrees, wrapping him back into a hug.

If they could just stay like this forever, holding each-other tight, never having to let go, they would.

Author's Note:

Thanks for reading! Hope you're enjoying!

If you are, please do leave feedback in a comment. Seeing my inbox scream even a "(1)" at me always boosts my confidence, even before I read the comment, so thank you so much for each and every one!